

Prufer's Pearls: Plagiarism in Ohio Contract Archaeology

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from a recent discussion of the Middle Woodland period (McDaniel 1988):

The predominant Middle Woodland manifestation in Ohio was the Hopewell culture, which lasted from 100 B.C. to A.D. 500. This culture was characterized by elaborate geometric earthworks, enclosures, and mounds which were often associated with multiple burials and a diverse assemblage of exotic ceremonial artifacts (Brose et al. 1978:68). Ceremonially, Hopewell appears to represent a continuation of the Adena culture, albeit on a more expanded and spectacular scales [sic] (Dragoo 1963:13). Hopewellian trade networks were extensive, and the raw materials for ceremonial objects were acquired from a various [sic] regions of North America. Copper and silver were procured from the upper Great Lakes area; quartz crystals and mica were acquired from the lower Allegheny region; obsidian and grizzly bear teeth came to Ohio from the west; while shark and alligator teeth, marine shell, and pearls were transported from the Gulf Coast (Prufer 1964:75).

Compare this with the following passage written by Immel and Kime (1982: 19):

In Ohio, the predominant Middle Woodland culture was the Hopewell, noted for its elaborate geometric earthworks, enclosures, and mounds which often were associated with multiple burials and a wide array of exotic ceremonial goods (Brose, et al. 1978:68). Ceremonially, the Hopewell appear to represent a continuation of the Adena but on a more expanded and elaborate scale (Dragoo 1962:13). Hopewellian trade networks were more extensive. Materials used in the manufacture of ceremonial objects were acquired from various regions of North America: copper and silver from the upper Great Lakes; quartz crystals and mica from the lower Allegheny region; obsidian and grizzly bear teeth from the West; shark and alligator teeth, marine shell, and pearls from the Gulf Coast region (Prufer 1964:75).

Except for a few obvious rearrangements and replacement of words and phrases ("wide array" becomes "diverse assemblage," and "more extensive"

becomes merely "extensive"), these texts are essentially the same. A few copying errors or corrections (it is "elaborate scale," not "scales," and the correct reference (it is Dragoo, 1963, not 1962) do not obscure the fact that one person is presenting the work of another person as his own composition.

So many contract archaeologists have presented this passage (or minor variations of it) as well as comparable passages on the Paleo-Indian, Archaic, Early woodland, Late Woodland, and Late Prehistoric periods as their own work that it is difficult to determine who originally did write it. A cursory check of the county files at the Ohio Historical Society reveals what is essentially the same text in reports by Baker and Kime (1981), Dewert, Kime, and Gardner (1981), Kime (1981, 1984), Immel and Barkes (1982), Immel and Benedict (1983), Immel and Frye (1980), Immel and Kime (1980, 1982, 1984), Norris (1984), Scheurer and Pape (1984), and Pape (1986).

One of the more recent examples is Pape (1986:15):

"Materials used in the manufacture of these ceremonial items were acquired from various regions of North America: copper and silver from the Upper Great Lakes; quartz crystals and mica from the Lower Allegheny region; obsidian and grizzly bear teeth from the west; and, shark teeth, pearls, and marine shells from the Gulf Coast area (Prufer 1964).

In fairness to Olaf Prufer, his original "Ur-text" should be quoted:

Judging by the vast amounts of native copper and silver objects found at Hopewell sites, connections with the Upper Great Lakes copper district must have been quite close...

"The lower Allegheny region provided the Hopewellians with quartz crystals, mica, chlorite, chloritic schist, and micaceous schist... The Rocky Mountain area may have furnished grizzly bear teeth, though there is some evidence that this beast may also have roamed the Minnesota and Wisconsin area before the arrival of the White Man... Whether obsidian came from the Yellowstone region is debatable... An alternative or additional source of this material is the Southwest and/or Mexico...

"From the Gulf region of Florida the Hopewellians obtained shark teeth, alligator teeth, barracuda jaws, and a variety of shells. Fossil shark teeth

Anyone who has read even a modest number of Ohio "contract archaeology" reports must be struck by the similarity and repetitiousness of many of the Phase I literature surveys. In large part this is due to the purpose of such Phase I reconnaissance, which is to provide a general archaeological background for the particular area being surveyed and to the fact that areas in close proximity to one another perforce have similar archaeological potential or context.

This repetitiveness is also due, however, to the ease with which substantial amounts of text can now be word processed and reprocessed. In fact, it is quite unlikely that contract archaeology would have so rapidly burgeoned into the lush bureaucracy that it has become were it not for the personal computer/word processor (and the photocopier); in any case, "boiler plating," to a greater or lesser extent, has become a commonplace in contract archaeology.

When a contract archaeologist has worked intensively in the same area it is often cost efficient to cite, quote, or rework relevant material from previous reports. There is a point beyond which efficiency becomes dishonesty, however—either 1) when essentially irrelevant or inappropriate text (one's own or someone else's) is presented, with little or no "reprocessing," merely to satisfy a requirement of the cultural resources management study, or 2) when the work of another person is presented, inadvertently or deliberately, as one's own. The first instance can be considered "padding" or boilerplating at its worst; the second instance constitutes plagiarism.

Consider the following passage taken

may have been obtained from the same area. On the other hand, very large numbers of Miocene shark teeth occur in the Calvert Formation or Maryland."

This was written 25 years ago, before the Yellowstone source of Hopewellian obsidian was established, and Prufer's caution in assigning a source to "the dark black glass" is admirable, as is his recognition that Miocene shark teeth might be found either along the Gulf Coast or the coastal area of Maryland. Therefore, the passage definitely should not be cited as evidence that obsidian did come from the Yellowstone area and that shark's teeth did come from the Gulf Coast. The passage certainly cannot be cited as evidence for the remarkable and absurd notion that Hopewellian pearls were traded from the Gulf Coast. Hopewellian pearls were gathered from freshwater naiads, not marine or brackish water oysters and they most assuredly were not traded from the Gulf Coast area. Prufer, we are certain, knew this, and he nowhere in this discussion even refers to pearls, but latterday contract archaeologists who have cribbed from him apparently were less knowledgeable and less careful.

In any case, while these continual references to Hopewellian pearls from the Gulf Coast cannot be laid at Prufer's feet, they do serve to show how pervasive and sloppy the recycling of archaeological background text has been among some contract archaeologists. In the same passage, in what was probably a slip of the pen, Prufer referred to quartz, mica, and various metamorphic rocks from the "lower Allegheny" when lower or southern Appalachians would have been more accurate. Rock crystal, muscovite, and chlorite are not native to the Pittsburgh region, as, again, Prufer well knows. This geographic or geologic lapsus calami, however, has been repeated by all subsequent workers who have referred to Prufer's discussion and who have unwittingly included the reference to pearls from the Gulf Coast. These two mistaken references serve to identify examples of this text purloined from whomever originally misread Prufer's article.

What remains less clear is who did originally write this and related passages. It would seem to have been someone employed at the Ohio Historical Society when that agency was actively engaged in archaeological contract work. The earliest report that I find containing these passages is Frye and Immel (1980), a report submitted by Donald R. Bier in March, 1980. Reports compiled by the Society previous to this date and submitted by Martha Otto (Dewert 1979) or by Otto and Bier (DeWert and Fairchild 1979) do not contain them. From 1980 on, virtually all contract reports submitted

by Bier contain these passages as part of a "boiler plate" archaeological background. Bier (pers. comm.) indicates that the text was compiled at his request by a number of Ohio Historical Society employees, but of course the joint and somewhat anonymous nature of the authorship does not obviate the need for proper acknowledgement. Only rarely (e.g., Skinner 1981) has this "boiler plate" ever been attributed, as it should be, to a previous report.

Of course, since many of these reports were issued through the same agency, the question of plagiarism is in some instances moot. Although routine acknowledgement of the original source of the boilerplate would have been in order, it seems evident that since the passage was originally composed by employees of the Ohio Historical Society nearly all archaeologists doing contract work through the Ohio Historical Society incorporated this and other extended passages in their reports, with little or no emendation, as a standard practice. While the wisdom of such a practice can be debated, the policy does not constitute plagiarism. The situation is more complicated, however, when the offending passage is reproduced without acknowledgement or attribution in a report authored by someone not working under the aegis of the Ohio Historical Society. This clearly is the case with Scheurer and Pape (1984), Pape (1986), and McDaniel (1988), as well as others.

The argument that the original passages appear in what may be considered a public document (though probably not considered to be such by the Ohio Historical Society) has no bearing on the question of whether the unacknowledged use of the material constitutes plagiarism or not. Nor does the question of the originality or accuracy of the passage used. In fact, it is the repeated reuse of erroneous statements that unequivocally identifies these instances of plagiarism and makes them so blatant. I have also heard the argument that because Phase I literature surveys are not really as important as Phase II and Phase III reports, "boiler plating" — even to the point of plagiarizing — is at most a venial sin. Certainly the general quality of many Phase I contract reports would suggest that this is a widely held opinion.

What should or what will be done about the situation is unclear. If we were dealing with a college term paper (or high school term paper, a more appropriate analogy in some of the instances), the result unquestionably would be a failing grade and very likely dismissal from the course. But in the "real" world of contract archaeology the possibility of any such action seems remote. Instances of such plagiarism have been routinely — perhaps unwittingly — accepted and approved by

the Ohio Department of Natural Resources, though their standards currently are applied so arbitrarily and erratically that the second of these points remains somewhat uncertain.

The Ohio Archaeological Council is perhaps the nearest equivalent Ohio archaeology has to an arbiter of moral and ethical standards, and possibly their Archaeological Services Review Committee will address the question, though this would not be an easy matter, since at least one of the offending parties is in the employ of the current chair of that committee. At the very least, it is hoped that bringing the matter to the attention of the broader archaeological community will make contract archaeologists pay closer attention to their Phase I reports and to the rudimentary courtesies of appropriate acknowledgement and attribution.

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